

St. Louis City and County Lake Improvements

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Remember the "Beverly Hillbillies" TV show? You know, with Jed, Granny, Ellie May, and Jethro. Remember the pool, the "cee-ment pond", in their backyard? To many, that is how St. Louis City and County park lakes appear--shallow, concrete, and without fish habitat. Though St. Louis' lakes are urban, they are much more than "cee-ment ponds" and are becoming better through lake improvement (renovation) projects developed and implemented by the Conservation Department.



St. Louis Park lakes provide close-to-home fishing for many area anglers and are heavily used. Each year, lakes receive over 2,800 hours of fishing on each acre of water.

That's 15 times more than Lake of the Ozarks! Some lakes offer good year-round fishing for bass, sunfish, and catfish. But many do not have adequate habitat to allow fish to survive and successfully spawn; other lakes have poor access for disabled anglers. That's where lake renovations come in. Like renovating an old house to improve living conditions for people, lake renovations remodel lake habitat to improve conditions for fish and fishing for anglers. But, to start this improvement, agreements with St. Louis Area lake owners needed to be ironed out.

In 1993, the Conservation Department entered into cooperative agreements with agencies in St. Louis City, Ferguson, Ballwin, Overland, Bridgeton, Kirkwood, and St. Louis County to improve 27 park lakes. The Conservation Department pledged over two million dollars to deepen

and aerate lakes, stabilize lake banks, and provide disabled-angler docks, trails, and parking. Several renovation projects have already been completed at Carondelet, Willmore, Tilles, Spanish Lake, O'Fallon, Suson, January-Wabash, Wild Acres, Veteran's Memorial, Bellefontaine, Forest, and Queeny parks.

Typical lake renovations involve several steps. First, the lakes will be drained and allowed to dry out. Draining and drying, which takes about 3 months, begins in September. Fish stocking is normally discontinued one month prior to draining. Emergency fish salvages allow anglers to quickly remove fish prior to complete draining.



After drying, Conservation Department crews deepen the lakes with excavating equipment. Eight to ten-foot deep holes will be created in the middle of the lakes, while keeping shallow and gradually-sloping sides. Material removed from the lake

bottom will be revegetated.

Aeration and better disabled-angler access will be added, too. Aerators will help stop fishkills due to low oxygen levels and allow for better survival of stocked fish. A small, land-based compressor and several underwater lines will transport air to diffusers. These diffusers will create an upwelling of fine bubbles that will aerate the lake.

Disabled-angler fishing platforms or docks, with accompanying trails and parking, will be

constructed at each lake. These concrete platforms or floating docks will extend into the lake, making it easier for disabled anglers to fish deep water. The parking areas and connecting trails will allow for easy access.



Fish habitat structures will be added near deep water. These rock or brush structures will give fish better habitat. Since fish concentrate around habitat, anglers should have better fishing, too.



With any luck, all this work can be completed within six months. Then, the lakes will be refilled and fish stocking will resume. As part of the Urban Fishing Program, carp or channel catfish will be stocked twice each month from April

through October. At some lakes, stocking of rainbow trout takes place during the winter.

The improvements will allow the Conservation Department to experiment with stocking largemouth bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish. Hopefully, these fish can establish naturally-reproducing populations and provide good fishing without additional stocking. Also, the deeper water will eliminate winter and summer fishkills that hampered several lakes.

While these lakes are being renovated, anglers can visit nearby lakes that offer good fishing.

More information on St. Louis fishing lakes can be obtained by calling the Missouri Department of Conservation (636/441-4554) and asking for the "Fish St. Louis" brochure.

The renovations will be temporary inconveniences, but will provide much better fishing, disabled-angler access, and in many cases, more species of fish to catch. Then, St. Louis park lakes will have much better fishing than Jed's "cee-ment pond" could ever hope to produce. And anglers won't have to endure Granny's rantings or Ellie May's critters either.